



Wallowa County Chieftain, File

The East Moraine provides a commanding view of Wallowa Lake. The management plan for the public lands on the south end of Wallowa Lake's East Moraine is one step closer to reality after the county commissioners approved two documents Wednesday, May 19, 2021.

Commissioners OK documents for moraine plan

Baseline report, governance document approved

By **BILL BRADSHAW**
Wallowa County Chieftain

ENTERPRISE — Progress continued toward developing a management plan for the East Moraine above Wallowa Lake as the Wallowa County Board of Commissioners approved a baseline documentation report and a governance document for the moraine Wednesday, May 19.

The East Moraine is largely a 1,791-acre parcel acquired by Wallowa County in January 2020 from the Ronald C. Yanke Family Trust. More recently, another 33 acres were donated to the county by the Oregon Parks and Recreation Department, bringing the total to 1,824 acres. The northern end is mostly grassland, while the southern end is forested.

The county is in the process of developing a management plan for the moraine, along with partners in the effort.

Eric Greenwell, a conservation program manager with the Wallowa Land Trust — one of the chief partners — explained the report at last week's meeting.

"The Baseline Documentation Report is a report that's compiled by Wallowa Land Trust in consultation with a lot of different professionals," Greenwell said. "What it's intended to do is document the baseline condition of the East Moraine at the time it was purchased. So it includes a lot of different information about land use, land-use law and regulations, any structures that were existing on the property. It takes a look at the habitat. There's a list

of plants and animals as an appendix to that document ... and a lot of other different things. It's designed to create a comprehensive report on the condition of the property at the time of purchase and at the time that a conservation easement would be conveyed to Wallowa Land Trust and the (Oregon) Department of Forestry. That is the intention of that document."

He said the professionals involved in compiling the report included retired wildlife biologists who've worked for Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife, foresters, silviculturists, knowledge-bearers and cultural resource specialists with the Nez Perce Tribe, county planners "and a whole array of planners and professions I've had the opportunity to work with."

The commissioners were impressed with the scope of the report.

"I might add there's a tremendous volume of work here, and we really appreciate it," Commissioner Todd Nash said. "You dug in and did the hard work, so kudos to you. Good job."

Commissioner Susan Roberts agreed, noting the long-time effort involved in the documents.

"We've seen this multiple times and we've provided input back and forth with Eric," she said.

Holding up the inch-thick report, she said, "It's a big read; I think it should be required big reading."

Governance document

As for the East Moraine Governance Document, it's a more nuts-and-bolts part of the plan.

"It's a much shorter document that identifies how we operate as a partnership," Nash said. "It's been bantered back and forth a number of times and it's to a spot

where we think it's ready for us here today."

Greenwell said the two documents are only part of the plan. The governance document is an essential part, he said.

"The actual management plan is still being worked on by the various professionals, but this would be the very beginning of the management plan that puts into the concrete process of how management decisions are made with the county as the owners ... and the professionals on a management committee to help make decisions about the property to support the commissioners and have a property manager to help make sure the property is managed," he said. "It's a document that'll be incorporated into the management plan to provide structure for decision making."

The commissioners had some questions about the details of the final plan, particularly that it will ensure the "land (is) used the way it's always been used," Commissioner John Hillock said. "That was our intention."

One concern — that of trail maintenance — was addressed by Franz Goebel, the county's director of planning. He said first, the county must adopt a master plan. Then comes the permitting process.

"The county, in 1988, adopted a nonconforming uses article which allows the continuation of a use that's been in place since prior to the adoption of that plan," he said. "That's what allows the county to continue the use regardless of ownership and also to repair or do anything to make it comply with current laws."

Possible changes

Trails fall under that category.

"Our stance on it is that

trails that are a preexisting, nonconforming use which, by right, can continue and be repaired and there can be work done on them to make them comply with current law, such as ADA (Americans with Disabilities Act) requirements, etc. These existed prior to the land-use rule. But there would need to be a ministerial review for the repairs or the upgrades that would be legally required to allow access prior to doing the actual work. That's my recommendation for the county's stance on how the process should work."

Goebel also addressed the possibility that a structure might be erected.

"If we build a structure, like a ranger station, then we need to go through a public permitting process," he said. "It depends on each

zone, actually, so it depends on where the ranger station would be. But as far as any of the trails that have already been in place for so long, we don't need to do anything. If we're widening a trail for somebody who's more mobile challenged or needs to drive somewhere or an approach to meet ADA requirements, then we'd get a zone permit for that."

Greenwell said the master plan should address such questions.

"Different zones are going to affect how you do work in different areas," he said. "So if there's an existing trail that you wanted to do work on, that might require a ministerial review you'd have to seek out with the Planning Department. If you do it in a different zone — say, you wanted to make a new trail — that would

be a different process and it would depend on what zone you're in to show you what process to take."

Mildred O'Callaghan, who created a wildlife overlay for the management plan, expressed concerns about increased residential density and that the plan couldn't be changed to address it once approved.

Roberts assured her that there will be many opportunities to make changes to the plan — including a public input process — prior to approval. She also said most parts of the plan are to be reviewed annually and the entire plan reviewed every 10 years.

"Once the plan is completed and we have approved it, it will go out for public comment before we adopt it — I just wanted to clear that up," Roberts said.

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